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FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING, A BEGINNING NOT AN END.

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COMMUNICATION, THE GOAL OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING, CANNOT BE ACHIEVED MERELY BY THE DEVELOPMENT OF LINGUISTIC SKILLS, FOR THAT IS ONLY THE BEGINNING OF COMMUNICATION. LANGUAGE CONSISTS OF SPEECH PATTERNS WHICH CAN BE LEARNED THROUGH PATTERN DRILLS, BUT BECAUSE LANGUAGE CANNOT BE SEPARATED FROM ITS CULTURE, THE DRILLS MUST BE DRAWN FROM THE CULTURAL CONTEXT IN WHICH THE LANGUAGE IS SPOKEN. THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF LANGUAGE LEARNING MUST BE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION, AN UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION OF OTHER CULTURES, AND AN AWARENESS OF HOW THE CULTURE OF A COUNTRY CAN BE COMMUNICATED THROUGH ITS LANGUAGE. ON ALL LEVELS, FROM ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ON, CULTURAL CONTEXT MUST BE INFUSED IN LANGUAGE LEARNING, AND LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL STUDIES SHOULD BE INTEGRATED. EVEN OUR IDEAS ABOUT STUDY ABROAD SHOULD BE QUESTIONED TO SEE IF LEARNING REALLY CAN TAKE PLACE IN THAT KIND OF COLLECTIVE AND ORGANIZED WAY. THIS SPEECH WAS DELIVERED AT THE CTA CURRICULUM CONFERENCE, FOOTHILL COLLEGE, OCTOBER 7, 1967, AND WAS PRINTED IN THE "NORTHERN CALIFORNIA FOREIGN LANGUAGE NEWSLETTER," VOLUME 16, NUMBER 63, DECEMBER 1967, PAGES 8-11. (AS)

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By Dr. Samson B. Knoll

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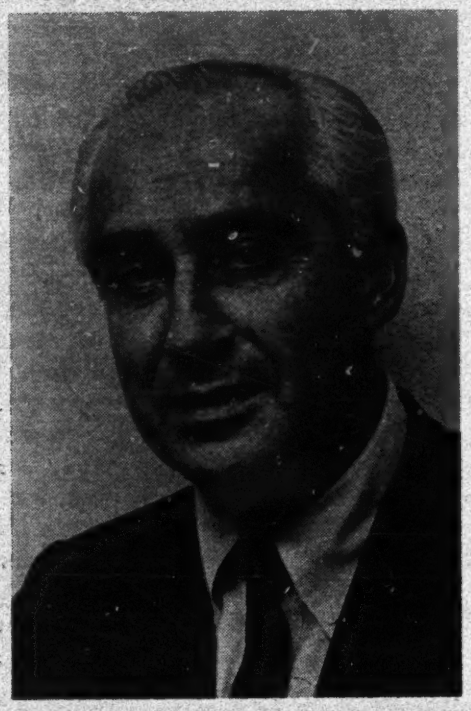

May I preface my remarks with a story which has the advantage of being both true and humorous: In March 1945, when the First U.S. Army was engaged in taking the city of Cologne in Germany, I was driving into that part of town which was in our hands, looking for a certain street. As a member of the Intelligence Section of the First Army Psychological Warfare Combat Team, I was trying to find my way to what we used to call a "target house", i.e. a house which was of special interest to us. As the jeep carefully proceeded through the rubble that then was the center of Cologne, I spotted two girls who were hurrying through the debris. I stopped them, and in my best German (which, after all was my mother tongue) asked: "Could you please tell me how I can find the Junkersdorf Ring?—The girls looked at me in total incomprehension, and finally one of them replied: "I am sorry, we do not speak English";—and she was rather surprised when I pointed out to her that I had addressed her in German.

I usually tell this story to reprimand my students when, as I put it, they listen with their eyes, not with their ears. But it seems to me that it also has a bearing upon our discussion today. For what really had happened to me in this strange episode?—

By all the established criteria of foreign language learning I ought to have achieved easily its ultimate goal, communication. My vocabulary was more than adequate; my grammar and syntax were perfect, as were my intonation, my stress, and my pronunciation. For I was, after all, that much coveted animal in the foreign bestiary, a native speaker. And yet, what this near-perfect linguistic equipment produced for me was not communication but a conditioned reflex. A reaction not to what I had said but to what the recipients of my simple German discourse had seen. In fact, what they saw with their eyes determined what they heard with their ears. And since they saw a man in American uniform, and Americans obviously —one is tempted to say "only"—speak English, they *heard* English, a language which I had no right to expect them to understand.

To put it differently: My perfect linguistic skill meant nothing, for they saw the cultural Me, not the linguistic Me. I was not able to achieve real communication, because for at least a brief moment the cultural Me completely overshadowed the linguistic Me.

I believe there is a lesson to be learned which, in fact, is the main premise of my discourse: That the development of linguistic skills, however necessary, however basic to foreign language learning, is not enough. That, most of all, the ultimate purpose of foreign language learning, communication, cannot be achieved by merely aiming at the development of linguistic skills; skills, moreover, acquired in conformity with rules evolved by grammarians, and promoted through patterns which too often reflect not the cultural attitudes of the peoples whose language is being taught but those of the teachers to whom the language, even more the culture it represents, are essentially foreign.

But language cannot be separated from its culture. What the Arab philosopher, Ibn Khaldun, some 600 years ago said of writing (after all, one of the language skills), surely can be said of language in general: "[It] is conditioned by the degree of social life and civilization attained.... For writing is a craft, and like all other crafts is conditioned by society".

If you find this recognition of the link between language and culture amazingly modern, you will find equally amazing the modernity of Ibn Khaldun's views on language learning which I should like to quote to you at some length:

"All languages are skills, similar to crafts. For they are skills of the tongue used to express meaning, the meaning being more or less successfully expressed according to whether the skill is more or less perfect. And the skill applies not to individual words but to syntax and the construction of sentences . . . Now, skills are acquired only through repetition of acts . . . . Thus, (just as a boy hears the different words and learns their meanings and then hears and grasps the different constructions) a person . . . hears the speech, style, and modes of expression of his contemporaries, refreshing his memory at every instant from every speaker until he has finally acquired a skill, or deeply rooted habit . . . . In this way languages and dialects are transmitted from generation to generation and learned by foreigners and by children."

Clearly as Ibn Khaldun recognized the importance of grammar to language, he yet had a very definite view of its function: "A skill . . . in language", he continued, "is not the same thing as a knowledge of grammar . . . . Because . . . grammar . . . [is] knowledge *about* the skill, but not . . . mastery of the skill itself . . . . Hence we often find eminent grammarians who know all the rules, yet . . . commit errors and are unable to find the right words to express their meaning . . . . Conversely, we find many who have mastered the art of . . . verse and poetry and who yet [know] nothing at all about the rules of grammar." Adding some insult to this not-so-subtle injury, Ibn Khaldun rather condescendingly was willing to admit that "we do indeed find some grammarians who are good writers, but that is rare and accidental". More important to him was a recognition that "practice is of all things the most conducive to the acquisition of a skill in language. Rules of grammar are merely the means to be used in learning".

It took most of the Western world, certainly us in the United States, several centuries to arrive at Ibn Khaldun's insight into the proper relationship between grammar and language and to accept his understanding that language consists of speech patterns that can and must be learned through what today we call pattern drills. Even more important to me is his insistence that these pattern drills must have meaning if they are to develop linguistic skills in the learner. Referring to Arabic, the language with which he was chiefly concerned, Ibn Khaldun insisted that it should be learned through

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the memorization of "examples" (we call them patterns) taken from "[early Arabic] speech, . . . from the Koran, Hadith [Sayings of the Prophet], and the pre-Islamic and early Islamic writers". He insisted that the skill thus acquired "will improve with use and repetition". Ultimately, he believed, this learning process would achieve that "the imagination of the student has a vivid picture of the loom upon which the Arabs wove their constructions. When this has occurred, the student will weave upon that same loom, thus becoming like one who has grown up with them and talked to them in their own language and [who] thus [has] acquired a skill in expressing his own thoughts in their tongue".

As I find these words eminently adaptable to the learning of languages other than Arabic, I am fascinated not only with Ibn Khaldun's view of language learning as such. Even more I am fascinated with his demand that the pattern drills through which a language must be learned should be drawn from the cultural context in which the language is spoken. For over and beyond his demand that these drills must be taken from the works of the poets and the religious writings of Islam, he demands by more than implication that they be taken from the entire realm of Islamic and even pre-Islamic culture. To put it differently: Much as Ibn Khaldun stressed the learning patterns over grammar, thus anticipating our own view by some 600 years, he demanded that these language patterns be meaningful in the cultural context of the language to be learned and that they therefore be drawn from the whole range of cultural experiences of the society concerned. A demand which, as far as I can determine, with very rare exceptions we have as yet not accepted as a basic, indispensable pre-requisite for language learning.

Ibn Khaldun was concerned not just with language as communication. He was concerned —as we ought to be concerned— with the two primary questions: "Communication for what," and "Communication of what?". I believe that with all our desire to make foreign language learning a key to communication, we have not yet paid sufficient attention to the content with which this mutual communication should be endowed. I am speaking of mutuality of communication, for surely the ideal language learning experience is a cultural exchange in which our perception is sharpened not only by the foreign culture, but also —perhaps at least equally so— by our own culture and its meaning to us and to others. I wonder whether we are sufficiently aware that what we wish our native tongue to communicate to those who study it, ought to be our criterion for what the study of a foreign language should communicate to our students. To the degree, therefore, that we wish English to become for others the vehicle of understanding our culture, we must fashion the foreign languages we teach into the vehicles of understanding the cultures they represent. And this must be the function of foreign language teaching on all levels of education.

I fully realize that this demand itself is not new. But I wonder to what extent we have met it in our classrooms. Above all, I feel that we have not sufficiently discussed just what the cultural content of each language offered is and how it can best be communicated.

I do not need to review before this audience the real and significant advances foreign language teaching has made in our country since the war. Many of us still remember, and still suffer from the effects of pre-war language study, when a "reading knowledge only" was considered to be its main purpose, and foreign language teachers were trained who could not speak the language they taught. All this is behind us, and the need for teaching the spoken language has been recognized widely, and we have reached fairly general agreement on teaching languages as means for communication.

As we have revised and refined our teaching methods in this new and vigorous approach to language study, significant strides also have been made in developing patterns of language learning and a host of teaching aids designed to endow the student with an effective skill in handling the language of his choice. Nobody can doubt the success of this approach. By and large the students who come out of today's language classes are far better equipped than their pre-war predecessors. But the question arises: "Is this dexterity synonymous with communication?".

Certainly it is so on a very elementary, not to say primitive, level. Most of our students can go abroad now and ask for the railroad station, the post office, or the nearest hotel, and many of them can order a meal in a restaurant— provided the menu does not differ too much from the clichés they learned in the chapter entitled "At the Restaurant" of the text they used at school. The trouble is that, in most instances, they could have asked these questions in English which is fast becoming THE international tourist language. Besides, we are still left with the —to me— nagging question: "Is this communication?" or at least: "Is this kind of communication enough?"

Does it suffice in today's world, a world in which the United States occupies a position of unprecedented leadership and responsibility, to develop language skills which, when utilized, amount to little more than paraphrasing our own petty needs in different sound patterns? Is it enough in today's world to view foreign language learning predominantly as the development of linguistic skills without simultaneously developing the skills needed to understand the cultural context in which each language is spoken? And the perhaps more fundamental question: Does language consist only of patterns of speech or does it also consist of something we may call "culture patterns"?

I believe the answer is obvious. I believe that speech patterns and culture patterns are identical in reality and ought to be identical in our language texts. I believe that language teaching and language learning can never achieve their ultimate goal unless they can make us understand a foreign culture not just as outsiders capable of translating what we perceive into our own terms, but as participants in that culture who are able to experience it, so to speak, from within. And we must acquire this ability not in addition to, but through our language studies.

To put it differently: The only level of communication that can be a meaningful goal of education today is the level of constant cultural exchange that must take place whenever our students encounter a foreign people through their language studies. For this above all we must remember: that we are dealing with peoples and their cultures, not just with languages. And this level of communication cannot be attained unless, beginning with the first lesson in the elementary grades, foreign languages are clearly and purposely taught to transmit the cultural background and cultural context in which each language is spoken. This in turn means that every lesson in our textbooks, every pattern drill and every grammatical exercise, must somehow be related to a cultural content and meaning. A child need not learn that a cat is grey in fifty-seven varieties of languages; but a child should learn something about the attitude toward cats in the foreign culture presented to him, which may well differ from the attitude toward cats in his own culture.

Most of you, I am sure, are familiar with the very excellent films that have been developed for audio-visual language training in our schools. Those I have seen —so far only excerpts of Spanish and French films— combine to an admirable degree pattern drills with a portrayal, indeed with a visual experience of the culture concerned. I wonder whether we have done the same in our textbooks, and whether we are doing enough of this in our classrooms. To be sure, we have "cul-

tural readers" —even "graded cultural readers"—, and we have "history readers", and we have a mushrooming variety of readers devoted to all phases and all levels of literature. Many of these editions, especially of the latter, are quite excellent. But somehow I cannot escape the feeling that these texts are not really conceived as integral parts of our language training but as appendages to it. They are a linguistic bow to the phenomenon of culture but they are not —and most of them are not really meant to be— integrated into the pattern of language learning itself.

It is my contention that such integration is precisely what must be achieved to raise language learning from the level of mere linguistic communication to that of intercultural communication. In other words, as Ibn Khaldun suggested these many centuries ago, the cultural context must be thoroughly and constantly infused into language learning on all levels.

At the school with which I am associated, we have tried —and constantly are trying— to do just that. The eight languages we now offer are taught in a Division of Languages and Civilizations, and courses in the history, the culture and the institutions of the societies concerned —taught on all levels exclusively in the language studied— form an integral part of the curriculum for our language majors. In a second division, which we call Political Arts, we have a Department of History, a Department of Politics and Diplomacy, and now a Department of International Economy, with five Area Studies programs cutting across these three departments. Since students in our Political Arts Division must have a strong minor in a language related to their area of concentration, we have occasionally discussed the feasibility of simply merging our two divisions. This would mean establishing several departments of world areas offering programs in both the languages, the history and all aspects of civilization relevant to these areas. A student then would have the choice of emphasis, i.e. he would decide whether he wants to be considered a language major or a major in another civilizational aspect(history, politics, or economics) of his world area. His emphasis would show in the concentration of his effort and in the orientation of his electives, but the basic program in a given world area would be the same for all students.

I must confess I find this an intriguing possibility. And even though we are not yet ready to experiment with it formally, we are trying in at least one way to integrate language and culture studies. We have developed in each language department courses that combine the history of the civilization concerned with that of its literature. To achieve complete integration, we hope eventually to have these courses taught by instructors who are not only native speakers —a prerequisite for joining our language faculty— and capable language teachers, but who at the same time are professional historians or have had professional training in some related discipline.

As I am basically a historian with many years of experience in teaching German, I have taught such a course for our German Department. The experience has been both interesting and promising. In the summer just past I could compare my impressions with those I gained teaching a similar course at the Stanford Institute for Advanced Study in German held for the last eight summers in Bad Boll, Germany. Although —perhaps because— I lectured exclusively in German, student interest remained high and reaction to the course at Bad Boll was unexpectedly positive. After the initial surprise, students began to follow my lectures with utmost concentration which led to increasing comprehension and thus they learned both German and history.

I have spoken of the Institute where I teach because I am most familiar with our efforts and our goals and with the level of achievement attained so far. But I wonder whether the integration of language and culture studies which we are attempting is not one key to success, if language as intercultural communication is —as in my opinion it should be— our goal. As we see it, the attainment of this goal does not involve the foreign language teacher alone; it is, certainly it should be, the goal of every humanist or social scientist among our colleagues. It would seem natural, therefore, to enlist their help in designing courses and teaching aids to develop that fusion of linguistic skill and cultural understanding which we must hope to awaken in our students. Yet, I wonder how many of the foreign language history readers you and I know have been written by, or even in consultation with, trained historians. And I wonder, how many of the foreign language textbooks that pride themselves in using cultural materials have been written in cooperation, or just in consultation, with experts in the pertinent fields. And yet it seems to me that only through such integrated efforts can foreign language learning become an effective instrument of meaningful communication. And I should like to repeat my conviction that this integrated effort must be made in foreign language teaching on all levels.

As, I trust, you remember, Ibn Khaldun spoke of repetition as the basis of language learning; he also believed in repetition as a general educational device. He felt that any subject should be taught in three cycles, each cycle taking into account the level of maturity and comprehension reached by the pupil. During the first, he learns the rudiments of the subject. During the second, he reviews what he has learned and is initiated into the works of experts who have contributed significantly to the field. The third and highest level adds the body of critical literature and the important interpretations and controversies concerning the subject. The student who has passed through this level of learning therefore will possess a full and yet critical mastery of his chosen field.

If we accept Ibn Khaldun's views as sound (and I am inclined to accept them), then the integration of culture and language must begin in our elementary schools and must be articulated through all levels and all phases of foreign language learning. This presupposes coordinating the efforts not only of teachers in different subject areas but also of teachers from the several levels of education. I submit that a discussion of the goals of foreign language learning, such as presented here, is not only of concern to the CTA Curriculum Conference but also to the Articulation Conference. At any rate, on each level teachers must remain aware, and must awaken and increase in their students this awareness, that the development of linguistic skills can only be a beginning. The end of foreign language learning is to develop in our students, and to deepen in ourselves, understanding and appreciation of cultures other than our own.

On the college level, with which I am most familiar, and lately also on the high school level, we have seen a steadily increasing number of attempts to provide American students with significant experiences abroad. I am not convinced that such programs, even if significantly broadened on a national scale, can be substituted for the integrated program of study advocated here. I am not even convinced that the American campus overseas does for its students what it claims or sets out to do: provide them through direct contact with a genuine and meaningful experience of a foreign culture. Most of the campuses I know are far from achieving this; they are, in effect, American islands in the sea of the foreign culture. Often they are located in spots of appealing scenic beauty but isolated from the life of the people whom the students are supposed to meet and whose culture they are supposed to learn to appreciate. Often, too, they are handicapped by being tied to the curricular requirements of the home college which limit the scope of the hoped-for experience.

I believe the time has come to take a critical look at these educational ventures abroad; the time has come to ask ourselves whether the experience of a foreign culture, if it is to be real and profound, is possible in a closely knit group such as an American campus overseas. We must also ask ourselves --and I consider this the basic question— whether a foreign culture can be experienced collectively, so to speak, or whether it can only be experienced through the near-complete absorption, at least for a time, of the individual into that culture. In other words: Can the experience of a foreign culture be organized or must it not always be something utterly and deliberately individual?

At the Institute where I speak we are trying the latter way. We have arrangements with universities abroad —so far Bordeaux and Hamburg— which permit our graduate students to enroll in these universities for a year or a semester. At each university we have one faculty contact who acts as the student's advisor. He is familiar with our program and our requirements and thus can advise the student as to the courses that meet his needs. But that is all. In all other respects our student abroad is expected to live and work like any other student at that university and to live in closest contact with the people in whose country the university is located. We have as yet too few students who have had this experience to evaluate it with validity. But we feel that we are on the right track, and we hope eventually to make this year abroad a requirement for all our M.A. candidates and to underwrite it with the necessary scholarships.

There is one prerequisite on which we insist: We do not admit a student to this study abroad who has not been prepared, both through his language courses and through courses in the civilization concerned, to meet his host people with a proven ability to communicate linguistically and with some measure of understanding of their culture and attitudes. We believe this to be an indispensable prerequisite for all programs of study abroad. For inability to communicate with, or to understand, other peoples not only is apt to alienate those whom our students are supposed to meet; it also is bound to drive them further into the cultural isolation of their respective American cliques. I am not convinced that the foreign country is the place to begin language learning, much as I am convinced that it is the best place to continue and advance it.

One last point: Certainly this Curriculum Conference is the forum to recall that the ultimate purpose of foreign language learning cannot be divorced from the broader educational goals of our society. As the position of the United States has changed in the post-war and post-European world, so have not only the goals of education, but also the purpose of, and the need for, foreign language learning. From the humanist and pedagogical point of view, intercultural understanding should always have been —and no doubt was— the high purpose of foreign language learning. In this day and age, the achievement of this goal has become a practical and urgent necessity.

Goal, and function of foreign language learning in our schools, therefore, are an integral part of the goals we set for education in our society. It is time that we as educators —and by this I mean basically the classroom teachers representing all fields of learning and education— attempt to define the optimum curriculum for the children of this state, and that we labor jointly to make this curriculum accepted by the state. Foreign language teachers must cooperate with their colleagues from the other subject areas to develop this optimum curriculum in a way which gives justice to the goals and needs of each subject area. I am convinced that in such a curriculum, conceived and formulated jointly, a meaningful foreign language program will be recognized as an integral and indispensable part of education in today's troubled world.

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